DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 409 EA 029 639

AUTHOR Cunningham, Valerie G.; Karr-Kidwell, P. J.
TITLE Conventional School and Curriculum Is Not for Everyone: Guidelines for Middle School Administrators and Teachers.
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 103p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Improvement; Educational Innovation; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Management Development; *Middle Schools; Professional Development; *School Administration; Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an extensive literature review on how society, families, and schools are entwined in a student's educational development and how these interactions influence the student's opinion of the value of education. It provides middle-school administrators and teachers a working guide for an educational environment that addresses the needs of at-risk middle-school students who have developed patterns of failure in the traditional school environment. It emphasizes that educators must find ways to compress school environments and reshape curricular and social ideas so that they are in accordance with students' life goals and those of industry. Subsequently, society should ask itself whether test scores or productive citizens are of greater importance. Suggestions for educational guidelines, based on questions posed to parents, educators, and students on what students need, are provided. The purpose of the guidelines is to help educators can develop a working model to be used and adapted to a community's needs. Such models should be based on findings that demonstrate students' need for a solid basis in the core subjects, their need to be accountable to themselves and others, and parents' need to become involved. Five appendices contain further information. (Contains 82 references.) (RJM)

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CONVENTIONAL SCHOOL AND CURRICULUM IS NOT FOR EVERYONE: GUIDELINES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

Valerie G. Cunningham, M.S.
Irving I.S.D. / Educator
Masters, TWU

PJ Karr-Kidwell, Ph.D.
Professor, Educational Leadership
Texas Woman's University

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INTRODUCTION

"School should not be confused with learning" (DeBlois, 1997, p. 714). The number of ways to aid students in attaining success, and then maintaining a student's interest, attention, and zeal for learning are as varied as any teacher's technique and personality, and thus, are reflected in the school's success rate. The number of characteristics of successful schools can range from a short list of five general statements (Atkinson, 1994; Gamoran, 1996; Wilson, & Corcoran, 1988) to a specific list of twelve characteristics (Dougherty, 1997; Glasser, 1997) or up to 95 characteristics, as listed for the Arizona schools (Wilson, & Corcoran, 1988). Each successful school setting has a list that contains the same sets of foci--to keep their students on track; to pass each grade level and tests; and to maintain enrollment/attendance levels. In Texas, for example, this is specified in each schools' Academic Educational Indicator System yearly report.

For most students and educators, this process works quite well. For many students, however, the process does not work, and they are often placed in special education programs or behavioral-alternative education placements (Senate Bill 1, Ch 39(b), 1995). Some students, try as they may, whether in regular, special education or English as a Second Language classes can realize their needs are not being met (Emihovich & Fromme, 1998; Meier, 1998) . These students simply do not fit any of these categories, and begin to fail. As marginal students begin to feel caught, they experience other factors that can cause them

not to perform up to their own expectations or the expectations of their teachers. As indistinct students begin to meet with limited success, they may also begin to display negative behaviors with such excuses as skipping classes, or presumed or real illnesses (Kelly, 1997; Jenkins, 1997; Romo & Falbo, 1996). Now, schools and communities become affected in negative ways socially and economically (Atkinson, 1994; da Costa Nunez & Collignon, 1997; Katims, Yin, & Zapata, 1997).

There are alternatives available to address the needs of these peripheral students within traditional school district campuses which are inclusive to all students' life and learning styles. These alternatives include mini-schools contained within larger campuses, magnet schools, self-contained buildings with specific agendas or focuses, and most recently, charter schools (Gamoran, 1996; Schwartz, 1995; Yancy, & Saporito, 1995). The alternative schools are designed to create an environment that will direct the student towards success with non-traditional methods. The alternative programs are often short-term, so that the student is back to his or her home campus as soon as it is feasible. This kind of programming often creates a "Yo-yo Effect," where students keep returning to the more secure, successful campus (Romo & Falbo, 1996). Educators must endeavor to investigate programs that work with greater equity for all students (Lawton, 1997; McGhan, 1997).

Extensive amounts of literature have been written about the various strengths and weaknesses of the adolescent who has incredible amounts of energy, that never seems to be channeled in socially and educationally

appropriate directions to be scholastically successful. The result of negative student behaviors, is the subject of countless daily television and radio-talk shows and news programs. The results are also found in statistical evidence of dropout rates, crime rates, teen pregnancies, and juvenile delinquency (Berreth & Berman, 1997; Ludke, 1997; Nunn, 1995).

Personnel in schools set goals, on a regular basis, to decrease their dropout rates and help eliminate negative juvenile behaviors in the community (Abbott, 1995; Glasser, 1997; Meier, 1998). These goals are developed by the schools and community, and along with attendance rolls, are tools used by the state in determining a school's success rate. The success rate of a school determines the amount of state and federal aid the school will receive each year to run their buildings and programs.

The purpose of this paper was to provide an extensive literature review of how society, families, and schools are entwined in a student's educational development, and can influence the student's view of the worth of an education. Using this criteria, the author described and developed a working guide, for middle school administrators and teachers, of an educational environment that addressed the needs of middle school at-risk students that have developed patterns of failure, over a period of time, in the traditional school environment. This model included curricular activities and resources that were both traditional and technological in nature.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There are many students in our schools today, who drop out even though they understand the consequences (Glasser, 1997; Montero-Sieburth, & Gray, 1992). John is a typical example found in many schools that illustrates the situation.

> John is 14 years old. He is capable of doing good work in school. Yet he read and writes poorly, has not learned to do more than simple calculations, hates any work having to do with school, and shows up more to be with his friends than anything else. He failed the 7th grade last year and is well on his way to failing it again. Essentially, John chooses to do nothing at school that anyone would call educational. If any standards must by met, his chances of graduation are nonexistant. (Glasser, 1997)

Students physically remove themselves at a rate of 25% yearly: 10 to 15% by sporadic attendance; 30% by negotiating treaties, compromising or by making bargains with teachers (Murphy, 1991; Romo & Falbo, 1996). Students also understand that education is important, but do not perceive it as relevant to their goals now or in the future (Monter-Sieburth, & Gray, 1992; Robb, 1995; Stallman & Johnson, 1996). Students, such as John, know that if they are to get good job, they must have a good education especially in the urban areas (Stallman & Johnson, 1996). Still, they continue to drop out of the school system (Glasser, 1997; Monter-Sieburth, & Gray, 1992). John and many others, however, wonder if the schools and teachers will allow them the opportunities they need to make needed changes to receive a good, meaningful education (Duarte, 1997;

Romo & Falbo, 1996; Smith, 1997). The problem that can cause these students to be put at-risk by the school is due to many situations such as lack of being engaged (Schmoker, 1996) learning problems, academic achievement, motivation, cultural differences and expectations, mental health issues, teenage pregnancy, and drug abuse (Kozel, 1995; Ludke, 1997). The list expands even into the social enviroment many children are forced to live into today that is increasingly violent, abusive, and has a growing disparity in economic conditions between neighborhoods and communities (Berreth & Berman, 1997; Kozel, 1995). All of these conditions and situations work together to make adjustments to the larger school environment difficult, and the opportunity to complete almost impossible (Nunn, 1995; Schmoker, 1996).

To deal with this phenomenon, all educators, but especially secondary, must find ways to compress school environments and reshape curricular and social ideas to be in accordance with students' life goals, and those of industry (Romo & Falbo, 1996). By reshaping educational methodology, teachers and students begin to function cooperatively and successfully within the larger school structure (Smith, 1997; Weir, 1996). The idea of changing our mega-size schools and white- collar curricular objectives seems daunting, but is worth it to help at-risk students and others feel that they have been heard, and can receive a meaningful education (Modell & Alexander, 1997; Scales, 1996; Stallman & Johnson, 1996).

Historical and Social Perspectives

The provision of an appropriate, meaningful education has been an issue of our nation for the last century. Beginning in 1903, new attendance laws were passed, as our society changed from an agricultural to an industrial nation. Calvin Woodward, for example, noted a concern about students who were increasingly unsuccessful in academics. As a result, he designed an alternative curriculum that concentrated on the manual arts (Monson, 1997). Later, in 1918, the National Education Association developed the Cardinal Principals of Secondary Education manual to emphasize the importance of subjects outside the core curriculum. In 1959, James B. Conant, President of Harvard, advocated greater efficiency in the secondary schools that included daily vocational and business classes (Monson, 1997).

Woodward, the National Education Association, and Conant, understood that it took more than a book to make students successful. Other experiences and skills were just as important, and had been essential throughout history. For instance, until the late 19th century and early 20th century, kinesthetic intelligence was a highly desirable ability to survive the daily rigors of life in the rural setting (Gardner, 1993). In urban areas, logic and linguistic intelligences had become more desirable for survival (Gardner, 1993; Glazer, 1970). Each new period of history has demanded specialized intelligences be utilized to strengthen abilities and required knowledge that defined societal community. Some people require a formal education to fulfill their highest aspirations, while others need

to learn at home, in specialized environments, or become apprentices. Each society uses educational goals to cultivate survival skills, perpetuate values, and improve their way of life, group needs, and social and economic development of the time period (Bass, 1997; Jacob & Jordan, 1992). Today, however, one needs linguistic, logical, and special abilities for survival in the world of technology (Gardner, 1993). People in society see formal schooling as the only pathway for a student to become a productive citizen as well as needing and using past social skills.

Schools have generally appeared in the past, to be centers of the adolescent's life, for example, but educators and administrators can not forget even the slightest importance of home life, jobs, cultural events, and peers' effect on how they view the importance of an education (Duarte, 1997; Gustafson & Cichy, 1996; Modell & Alexander, 1997). Astone & Upchurch (1994) point out that at different points in history, for example during the 1920s and 1940s, adolescents left school to take care of siblings while their mothers worked, or so they could go to work to support their family.

If a modern family is homeless, as illustrated by Gustafson & Cichy (1996), a child becomes highly influenced by life experiences that comes from being in constant turmoil and social hassles of not having a permanent home. The students living in cultural poverty have problems being encultured to the rest of society (Jacobs, 1993), and are lost to greater educational opportunities, because they cannot get to school and when they do, they are far behind, resulting in

their self esteem becoming weaker. Duarte (1997), on the positive side, notes that when the parent reads and sets a good example, the child will generally overcome the social and peer pressures to graduate. Even so, today's adolescents often see schools as irrelevant, especially those of other cultures and living at poverty level, are not interested in professional careers (Ensminger, Lamkin, & Jacobson, 1996; Romo & Falbo, 1996).

Today, students often do need a strong academic or core knowledge of basic skills in the world. In a study conducted by Emihovich and Fromme (1998), there are also other issues and problems that have evolved in recent decades.

> New morbidities (threats that are induced by behavior rather than biology) have created issues that do not come as any surprise to urban educators, who in addition to struggling with national, state, and local demands to increase achievement levels, also find themselves grappling with the myriad cultural, economic and social problems that today's urban youths bring to school. (p. 139)

For example, today's students come to schools located in hostile surroundings that contain gangs, drugs, shootings and other abuses of life (Kozel, 1995). Several decades ago, the students' lives centered around the school and these subcultures (Modell & Alexander, 1997). Today, they see that they can make money now, and get greater respect from outside sources that do not include family or school. The respect gained from having an employer and making a living, is better than sitting in a school that may well be perpetuating a sense of worthlessness and low self esteem gained by mandated school-education requirements that do not effectively address different learning styles (Dougherty,

1996; Hoerr,1996; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Kelly, 1997), teacher attitudes (Chidloe, 1996; Smith, 1997), and the knowledge that most of what they are learning is not meeting their needs (Scales, 1996; Schmoker, 1996), or those of the work place (Romo & Falbo, 1996).

These schools do try to eliminate tracking, possibly caused by early vocational classes and influenced by learning styles, and to raise academic standards, but an educator's abilityto easily use appropriate learning strategies so they can be flexible to meet student objectives has been lost (Smith, 1997). It is also understood that sometimes tracking is good, when done correctly which, when employed, can be restrictive and without room for the student to grow and mature just to meet the school's needs (Falbo & Romo, 1996). As a result, the student's needs may have, at times, needed to be reversed without student penalty, because that student's needs and goals have evolved to a new level (Duarte, 1997; Romo & Falbo, 1996). As a result, Nancy L. Karweit (1997), a principal research scientist at the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, based at John's Hopkins University, states "What school reform should be about is having flexible enough arrangements so that all children can receive the instructional depth and time that is required for them to make progress" (Lawton, 1997, p. 37). Students, like previously mentioned John, dream of such flexibility that allows them to grow and learn within reasonable limits (Brindis & Philliber, 1998; Scales, 1996). These students want to be able to learn information that is relevant and useful in the real world, as they transform

from high school student to college student and/or a productive citizen in the world of work. They also realize they can change their course of academic behavior and excel or change and still be held back by the educational system (Brindis & Philliber, 1998; Murphy, 1991).

Socioeconomic Perspectives

Many schools define success as knowing "stuff," and possessing certain forms of information (Duttweiler, 1995; Glasser, 1997; Hoerr, 1996). Once students and society understand this, questions then arise to what is the purpose of the curriculum, if it does not address the needs for successful living in a society with various needs. As the social culture is seemingly breaking down around the school community, due to high population density, unequal affluence, racial differences (Banks, 1994; Glazer, 1970) and unequal employment opportunities continue, many wonder how core curriculum programs or art objectives will positively affect on their life's goals (Schmoker, 1996; Stallmann & Johnson, 1996).

Secondly, with high population comes problems of pollution, levels of cleanliness (Glazer, 1970; Kozel, 1995) and other health issues that cause illnesses that make it difficult for students to focus on learning "stuff" with effective practices or strategies (Gough, 1997; Nunn, 1995). Perhaps it is not the children's or school's fault that they are not learning, but the fault of a society that is also at-risk (Glazer, 1970; Emihovich & Fromme, 1998; Thompson, 1995) and chaos perpetuating the problem through the kinds of jobs available in the community,

not investing in quality education and student achievement (Stallman & Johnson, 1996). Since business can heavily influence the community and what gets done, it also can mandate the choices of classes that students can take by setting new criteria in state education laws to meet their needs (Bass, 1997; Stallman & Johnson, 1996).

To address the challenges presented by new laws, some students choose methods such as marriage and/or becoming a teenage parent. These choices usually do not lead students to a productive life (Emihovich & Fromme, 1998; Ludke, 1997; Romo & Falbo, 1996). Educators that emphasize that students stay in school so they can learn to become caring, happy, creative, responsible, and curious citizens, they develope a lifelong desire to learn (Gamoran, 1996; Hoy & Hannum, 1997). This expectation does begin to meet the needs of employers who do want lifelong learners as employees who are also creative and team workers (Duttweiler, 1995; Romo & Falbo, 1996). During recent decades, educators have attempted many alternatives to address the situation. **Education's**

Attempts to Address the Issues

Educators, parents, and students understand that an education is important, but it is not just what the student learns in a book that will make one a successful person (Monter-Sieburth, & Gray, 1992; Toeppen, 1997). It is also important for all students to attain a balance in both individual core subjects and in project subjects such as arts and physical activity, to balance a person's brain from academic over-stimulation (Atkinson, 1994). Such academic over-

stimulation, in certain learning styles, can restrain the brain from its ability to work efficiently, and learning sequences can not happen (Abbott, 1997; Gardner, 1993). Therefore, school administrators and educators must be aware that not all students need to be directed towards technology and the sciences to be successful later in life, as society and business would want us to believe (Goldberger & Kazis, 1996). Taking required academic tests and passing with 75%-90%, or being apart of higher level core courses in traditional settings, does not meet everybody's learning styles or address multiple intelligences (Dougherty, 1996; Gardner, 1993; Hoerr, 1996).

Flexibility within the school system, is difficult to find, so students build other coping mechanisms or behaviors. The methods that students invent are often unacceptable behaviors that eventually lead them to poorer life choices--absentees, truancy, and/or disruptive behaviors (Johnson, 1995). Students are then removed from the usual learning environment to other less desirable and inflexible settings, until a more "appropriate environment" can be found (Duttweiler, 1995; Murphy, 1991; Russell, Grandgenett & Lickteig, 1994; Weir, 1996). As compulsory attendance ages increase, it also becomes more difficult to drop out legally and receive a G.E.D. diploma as an acceptable alternative (McGhan, 1997). As a result, educators must begin to focus on what students need to learn and know as good citizens, each in their own right (Gough, 1997; Jenkins, 1997). This is further pointed out in the book by Linda Darling-Hammond, in a review by Carolyn Riehl, "... that stretches them to achieve very

high standards yet affirms their basic humanity and right to pursue what matters most to them" (pp. 683-684).

All personnel in schools understand they will work with a diverse set of cultural communities of learners from different and unique families. For example, state and national education agencies try to address integration with remedial programs designed to address problems of multi-cultures, student failures, and drop-outs (Carroll, Blake, Camalo, & Messer, 1996; Cruz & Duff, 1997; Reihl, 1997). The programs have not yet reached a high level of success, since they often fail to address the students' needs, and allow for the teachers' ability to show care and compassion towards needy students (Roberge, 1995; Russell, Grandgenett, & Lickteig, 1994). It is not that teachers do not care, but that there is often a lack of sufficient emotional or material resources available for the teacher to draw upon. Furthermore, the knowledge base and experiences they have do not relate in real terms to needy children, and that even diminishes as the students grow older (Russell, et al., 1994; Schmoker, 1996) These children become lost to the system, lose valuable classroom and teacher time, and their achievements remain statistically the same (Chidolue, 1996; Glazer, 1970; Nunn, 1995; Pawlas, 1996). The families of these children are also removed from the reality of the schools and are no longer focused towards the educational environment,and their attitudes influence the child's attendance and self esteem, which influence their academic records (Glazer, 1970; Pawlas, 1996).

Family View of the Effects of the Society on the Schools

Today, cultural poverty abounds in all kinds of families and there is a notable difference between cultures in terms of how each child is prepared to the proper development levels to achieve in school (Burdell, 1998; Jacob, 1993; Pawlas, 1996). The cultural difference of educational opportunity appears to be changing today; though there are still substantial differences between racial and sociological groups, but the gap is narrowing (Upchurch & McCarthy, 1989). For instance, between 1940 and 1959, Hispanics were not noted for any educational involvement (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 1997). Today, Hispanics are making a growing and significant impact on our schools. More women, and all racial groups are graduating from high school, an average of 19% in 1958, as compared to 56% in 1986 (Upchurch & McCarthy, 1989; USDOE, 1997). Change has happened across all low income groups no matter their national and cultural origin, though the advancement is still uneven (Astone, & Upchurch, 1994; Romo & Falbo, 1996; USOE, 1997). While change has been slow and difficult, it has happened in spite of the many factors already mentioned.

In 1908, low income families comprised 25% or more, of one-fifth of the nation's school districts (Wilson, & Corcoran, 1988). These families existed within supportive communities. Today, however, these students exist in an extremely violent, abusive social environment with increasing economic disparity in growing numbers (Berreth & Berman, 1997; Katims et al., 1997; Kozel, 1995). If these students are to achieve the higher levels of success that

society desires, then an understanding of the cultures of these families becomes essential to our ability to motivate students to progress educationally (Carroll et al., 1996; Cruz, & Duff, 1997; Jacob, & Jordan, 1992; O'Neil, 1998; Pawlas, 1996).

When a single mother or father has not remarried, has a history of unemployment or an inconsistent ability to maintain a job for long periods of time, there is little energy left to support his or her student (Atkinson, 1994; Berreth & Berman, 1997). These parents, single or otherwise, that live in cultural poverty have enough to do as they work to provide for daily needs, and it is difficult to cope with the added responsibility of the child. The more a family is in transition, due to moving from apartment or housing project or other slum condition to another (Atkinson, 1994), the stress to survive increases, and education becomes secondary (Jacob & Jordan, 1992; Wilson, & Corcoran, 1988). Worse, the child has lost the necessary stability needed to be a good student. All this adds up to the child and family feeling that there is no use, nothing will ever change, with or without an education (Atkinson, 1994).

For these marginal children to learn, they must learn extra skills beyond academic skills. The skills include learning to trust, accepting help, and seeing the meaningful, useful possibilities of being a successful member of society (Atkinson, 1994; Berreth & Berman, 1997; Glasser, 1997; Glazer, 1970). However, it is easier not to be open to a student's needs, than it is to help him or her to learn trust and be successful. When educators open up to building greater trust

of students, they begin to go beyond negative family attitudes (Russell et. al., 1994; Weir, 1996).

When students can see their parents, teachers, and community working towards acculturation for appropriate learning and social skills, they begin to understand that there is value in being at school and learning (Sandler, Vandergrift, & VerBrugghen, 1995). As school personnel take more steps to work and communicate more openly with families and the surrounding community, greater communication is established and each becomes more responsive to the other (Duarte, 1997; Hackett & Baran, 1995; Kinley, 1996; McGhan, 1997).

As communication efforts improve, prevention of further conflict, miscommunication, and misunderstandings at all levels occurs (Atkinson, 1994; Jacobs, 1993; Reinhard, 1997; Schwartz, 1995). Openness builds trust and responsiveness between schools and community, and allows all to move beyond negative attitudes and conflict (Hoerr, 1996). When students and reluctant adult groups are invited to see a variety of other adults coming together, with common interests being addressed, more cultural and economic groups can move beyond the idea that school is to learn "stuff" (Glasser, 1997; Hoerr, 1996). Mr. Bass (1997), of the University of Mississippi , suggests that educators forget to ask themselves what they are trying to accomplish and what exactly is the goal of what they are teaching and if it really effects the big picture of preparing the students for the needs of society (p. 128).

When students do not perceive that these adult leaders are working toward a common goal of education, a student's focus can become negative and he or she can develop conflictive attitudes. Students and families then continue to develop inappropriate manners of relating to the schools and find ways to avoid the best possible education (Atkinson, 1994; Gamoran, 1996; Glazer, 1970). The result is that these students take desperate measures to remove themselves from the educational environment by pregnancy, illness for whatever cause, expulsion, or pure hopelessness (Duttweiller, 1995; Kelly, 1997; Romo & Falbo, 1996). If the schools work for enculturation with the child, the parents and community will be carrying out positive role modeling (Glasser, 1997; Schwartz, 1995; Thompson, 1995).

Each student also learns with inherited aptitudes gained from unique backgrounds of traditions from family, mass media, language, religion, and neighborhood morays, waiting to be enhanced by an education (Toeppen, 1997; Wilson, & Corcoran, 1988). The family also provides a knowledge basis that has been created by past traditions. If a family is truly interested in keeping the family cultural and social traditions and native language alive, the normal educational process is more difficult, because family forces have a strong influence on students (Bass, 1997; Duarte, 1997).

The Need for Educators to go Beyond the Norm

Some educators see these students as backward or dull because they are not like the norm. Educators forget that students can be taught to learn more, by

enhancing the right aptitudes or any of The Seven Intelligence's, as defined in Gardner's works, and being recognized by educators and society (Atkinson, 1994; Gardner, 1997; Hoerr, 1996). Today, educators and society seem to prefer to pass over these skills as nonessential to creating a successful, well-rounded citizenship base in a technological world through cooperative education processes (Hamillton & Hamillton, 1997; Hoerr, 1996; McGhan, 1997; Toeppen, 1997).

The bureaucratic schools of our large cities are viewed by their communities as being run by "liberal professionals" that do not allow for enough parent or community controls of student learning and behavior (Glazer, 1970). This liberal view, along with a well developed curriculum that leaves out parent participation, succeeds in further alienating students from academic work forgetting about possible other academic opportunities (Anderson & Lee, 1997; Hoerr, 1996). When parents have opportunities to participate appropriately, successful reintegration of the lost or troublesome student occurs. Students begin to remain in school and become academically successful (Jacobs, 1993; Robb, 1995; Russell et. al., 1994). An example of positive parent and community partnerships includes the utilization of site-based management and open, welcoming atmospheres, inviting involvement by the community and parents (Atkinson, 1994; Thompson, 1995). Educators and administrators in schools are working harder to satisfy a dissatisfied public constituency, to improve

performance, and stabilize the schools environments to insure success for all (Atkinson, 1994; McGhan, 1997; Robb, 1995).

Personnel in public schools recognize that parents can actively make school choices that insure their children's academic success (Hurley & Lustbader, 1997; Robb, 1997). Personnel in public schools also notice that private schools see parents and students as customers, not as constituents (Gamoran, 1996). If private schools seem to produce higher rates of success, then parents want to find ways for their student to attend those schools. As parents shop for their student's school, they must also look at the school's philosophy, focus, student-teacher rapport, and methods utilized, to be sure their children are getting the education for which they are paying (Schwartz, 1995). In some instances, private schools are no better than public schools (Gamoran, 1996), and may not be any different than a public school, because students are not invited to learn to take risks beyond learned concepts or effectively investigate their own ideas (Atkinson, 1994; Chidloe, 1996; Hoerr, 1996). Teachers, whether private or public, must remember the student is the center of the educational process (Modell & Alexander, 1997) and be able to monitor progress consistently and invite students to question, invent, anticipate and dream of becoming (Gardner, 1997). When students have a safe, flexible community to grow, they become empowered as worthwhile, intregal persons within a successful learning environment (Russell et. al., 1994; Smith, 1997; Weir, 1997). Still, schools unwittingly are set upto

unknowingly contribute to the dropout problem in various manners (Emihovich & Fromme, 1998; Smith, 1997; Robb, 1995).

Students who leave schools because of unsuccessful learning environments, fights with teachers and/or parents, or just feeling stigmatized with prejudice from past behaviors (Kelly, 1997) and use the easy way out (Hoerr, 1996), might choose to attend magnet schools that were first developed as a way to achieve school desegregation orders (Gamoran, 1996; Schwartz, 1995; Yancey, & Saporito, 1995). Later these school programs evolved into alternatives to boost achievement rates, along with established special vocational schools and/or programs (Monson, 1997). As achievement improves outside the traditional or professional track that many adults felt necessary to a student's life-success goals, so can self esteem. When Nancy Chubb, Fertman, and Ross (1997) evaluated female self esteem and focus issues, the adolescents that followed vocational tracks often had higher self-esteem than those on the traditional or professional learning track. The explanation that they concluded was that these girls knew what they wanted, and therefore, a level of competition was minimized.

Many districts have begun to look to flexible and alternative programs and formed alternative plans to address these issues--smaller schools within mega schools were formed, schools were set up in store fronts, and realignments of grades and age groups were made to conform better to how and what students needed to learn. Other curriculum processes were also implemented to allow

students many learning tracks, by assuming that young people can effectively direct their own learning (Robb, 1995) to include the arts (Manzo, 1996), community participation that emphasised problem solving (Steven, vanWerkhoven, & Castelijns, 1997), and flexibility, if one way was not working out (Carbo, 1997; Glasser, 1997; Weir, 1996). Teachers showed greater attention to their students' needs and what was needed for them to become successful, interested lifelong learners. With these adjustments, teachers now create more successful learners, both at school and in society (Glasser, 1997; Krajewski, Bonthuis, Kluznik, & Miller, 1997). Teachers and administrators can not do it on their own. They need outside help, as previously noted, from the community and, most importantly, from the parents whenever possible. When all parts of the community are working as a team, they create successful learners with successful and appropriate roll models (Dougherty, 1996; Emihovich & Fromme, 1998; Hackett & Baran, 1995; Wilson, & Cororan, 1988).

Some parents are able to find ways to reinforce the learning and performance standards set for the students by being a part of the school community. These parents know about their choices, what is available within the district or building, and seek out those choices. Thus, another challenge to the school is to make all parents, especially the low-income parents, aware of the opportunities for their students, as they do not have the same networking devices of the involved parents (Reinhard, 1997; Thompson, 1995). Overt communication also helps build the trust that parents and students need to work

with the teachers and schools over the long-term (Monter-Sieburth, & Gray, 1992; Kinley, 1996; Krajewski et al., 1997). The openness of educators presents a welcoming atmosphere that is conducive to perpetuating solutions, so that the desired successful students are produced (Bass, 1997; Brindis & Philliber, 1998; Duarte, 1997).

Educators and Community Outreach

Students with strong desires to go beyond the regular curriculum do find ways to accent their learning experiences by going to magnet or special focus schools. Magnet schools and focus schools provide clear lists of goals and high expectations of their students (Schneider, Schiller, & Coleman, 1996; Schwartz, 1995; Thompson, 1995). Students that attend these schools, become aware that they are important and have individual strengths that make them capable of learning. As they gain confidence, the teachers are able to concentrate on the students' needs and can better nurture individual uniqueness (Checkley, 1997; Hoerr, 1996; Robb, 1995). If educators continue to get stuck in just the basics, then individual needs are only partially addressed, the use of multiple intelligences are ignored, and students are again lost to the system (Duarte, 1997; Glasser, 1997; Nunn, 1995; Smith, 1997).

As students and their families become more adept at seeking out information about alternative school settings, they have an advantage of satisfying educational goals. Students that attend these school environments report higher levels of educational satisfaction and higher self esteem (Chubb, et

al., 1997; Hoerr, 1996). Student behaviors and self perceptions are enhanced by the level of expectations of society, family, and environments (Atkinson, 1994; Duarte, 1997). Furthermore, when art or science projects are balanced with academics, the student gets more of what is needed for success in both immediate and future educational goals (Abbott, 1995; Glasser, 1997; Pasi, 1997).

Marie Carbo (1997), other educators and researchers point out that when student strengths are enhanced, weaknesses are addressed, concentration is on improvement, not penalty, and learning choices are varied, as needed, greater success is achieved. Carbo (1997) emphasizes that when educators take time during the learning day to reflect, feel, think, and act, learning is accentuated from the heart and not just the head. Thus, learning begins to expand outside of the learning day into the community (Abbott, 1997; Glasser, 1997). Schools become different places to be a part of and students can no longer use easy ways out of the school because they are learning new ways to cope and deal within their communities.

Chidloe (1996) also notes in her study of teacher-time that when student contact is direct and purposeful, the student is more likely to be successful at school, and then the workplace. Teachers need to understand how to reach their students for maximum efficiency, and to peak interest that will provide for positive outcomes that will transfer to the workplace (Chidloe, 1996: Glasser, 1997; Robb, 1995). When students or graduates arrive at the workplace with good communication, comprehension and computation skills at a job site, they will be

more likely to succeed (Astone & Upchurch, 1994; Murphy, 1991; Pasi, 1997). To achieve this, schools in the 1980s began to emphasize basic and higher-order thinking skills, because that was what the workplace demanded in everyday jobs (Romo & Falbo, 1996; Wilson, & Corcoran, 1988). Blue collar jobs are also on the rise, as is the need for basic work skills (1997).[1] Those who are able to understand and carry out directions are needed. Thus, educators will need to address a wide spectrum of needs and to direct their students in appropriate directions as they enter the world of work (Barrios, 1997; Burdell, 1998: Romo & Falbo, 1996).

To help these students transition from school to work, they must experience success and learn how to be effective risk-takers. If the school is totally focused on academics and test scores, students are not being prepared to enter job markets (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Roberge, 1995; Stevens, Werkhoven & Castelijns, 1997). Students want to focus on their goals, improve their behaviors, and learn to become more independent. If teachers are doing all the directing, students are not learning about the independent thinking skills they will need on a job site (Abbott, 1997; Riehl, 1997; Weir, 1996; Wulff & Steirz, 1997). Some researchers actually feel that the student should be the one who works the hardest in a classroom, not the teacher (Stevens et. al., 1997). When teachers spend their day directing learning, at-risk students become greater problems, which yields weak academic performances. This can also be due to a lack of specific programs and counseling attempts directed at the at-risk student to better enable student learning (Gamoran, 1996).

Challenges and Prescriptions for Educators

Educators can solve these challenges. Magnet schools and special focus schools offer partial solutions (Gamoran, 1996; Schwartz, 1995). If the students who need them can not access the relevant information or be transported easily, however, then these ideas are of little help. Newer options include smaller schools within the school (Kinley, 1996; Smith, 1997; Wilson, & Corcoran, 1988). Here, certain students only attend a specific area of the building or campus, but still have access to other campus services. Finally, if there are to be greater levels of success and lower dropout rates, the educators and administrators in the school must risk opening up to the public and eachother, for greater levels of support and input (Brindis & Philliber, 1998; Kinley, 1996; Robb, 1995).

More innovative plans and actions for improving success rates can be found within the community, business, and students' social-cultural ways of life (Duarte, 1997; Ensminger et al., 1996; Stallman & Johnson, 1996). For instance, with more community input, students may get real hands-on experiences as productive citizens. When the student is from a tribal or gang culture, educators cannot teach relevant civics from a book written for suburbanites. If students might get to deal within a tribal or town council by making presentations and speaking to these groups in intelligent and convincing manners, it leads them to a greater understanding of community government (Sandler et al., 1995). The experiences require that they better prepare themselves to defend their messages with meaningful knowledge that they sought out. Now the "at-risk" student can

return with positive expectations in a modified educational environment to gain a diploma, G.E.D., or enter an apprentice program with the confidence needed to succeed (Jacob, 1993; Sandler et al., 1995).

School-to-work programs involve transitions at several levels. In elementary, it may be just field trips to businesses or factories. Middle schools may set up mock-working situations, service learning or unpaid internships. Later, in high school, there would be actual employment training, cooperative education opportunities, apprenticeships, and paid internships (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1997). Each of these programs require one-on-one attention of an educator or mentor, as well as contact with a workplace coordinator.

As schools and workplace personnel organize to mentor students, they feel a new sense of importance and develop new meaning of their self worth. The educator and mentor then work together in ways that are encouraging to the students. In turn, students' opinions and perceptions are tested in real and safe environments (Pasi, 1997; Russell et al., 1994; Steven et al., 1997). In personalized organizations, students come closer to being provided relevant guidance and career information (Jenkins, 1997).

These students that are lost between the slightly better than average students and those receiving special services generally are not interested in the social trappings of the traditional high schools, although such avenues keep them motivated, especially if they were directly able to be involved This is reported from many conversations with students and parents over a period of

time (Romo & Falbo, 1996; Smith, 1997; Weir, 1996).[2] Mostly they want education to be relevant to their needs. Often times, the students have special talents they want to enhance, so that they may begin living productive adult lives as soon as possible (Duarte, 1997; Stallman & Johnson, 1996; Wulff & Steitz, 1997). They understand math is important and that the problem-solving techniques of algebra, geometry or calculus may be helpful someday, but taking these detailed courses at this time is a waste of their time. These students may see why some literature is important and may actually read a classic someday, but at this time it is better to understand how to read a manual that teaches their vocation (Atkinson, 1994; Carbo, 1997; Dougherty, 1996; Robb, 1995). They may know they can handle a job, and that they are not lesser for not choosing a homogenized education. These students are just ready to move on and try life at a younger age than others (Emihovich & Fromme, 1998; Ludke, 1997; Romo & Falbo, 1996). Their intelligence is not a question, or the quantity of classes for the sake of having knowledge of non-essential information, but they are able to solve certain kinds of problems and produce quality work (Chidolue, 1996; Hoerr, 1996).

It is clear from these considerations and alternatives, that schools and educators need to learn to adjust and be flexible to addressing society's intelligence factors (Bass, 1997; Gardner, 1983; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1997; Riehl, 1997). During the past century, educators and students have seen a need to adjust the educational system to help more students be successful and become quality

graduates (Abbott, 1997; Bass, 1997; Carbo, 1997; Nunn, 1995). Examples such as magnet schools, smaller schools within schools, and special schools were designed to meet individual needs and objectives of these students.

Many students are meant to go to college; still others are meant to be successful in ways outside the homogenized, bureaucratic system of education today. Different kinds of students keep educators creative and resourceful, both within the educational system and society (Gamoran, 1996; Wilson, 1988). Marginal students also keep our society and economic system in balance, by filling in where science and technology cannot always meet our needs.

Specific Prevention for all Cultures and Potential Dropouts

In a study conducted by Nancy Robison (1996), "students were studied from white, middle class, two-parent, suburban backgrounds with no history of academic difficulties, and who had been identified as potential dropouts or had stopped attending school. The students were interviewed,

> ... perceptions of unworthiness, lack of parental involvement and feelings of isolation were all related to the phenomenon of being of risk, and in some cases to their decisions to leave school. In many cases, students felt that they had lost a significant person in their lives before becoming at-risk; this loss took the form in the data of a sibling going off to college, a parent becoming geographical dislocated by employment, etc. (p. 2426).

Brindis and Philliber (1998) and Wulff and Steitz (1997) also note all individuals of the different economic and ethnic backgrounds become pregnant or start their families early, suffer other abuses, and low self esteem, while Robb (1995) also notes that 80% leave school with a "C" average or better. Though

race and economic status may be a major contributor to becoming a potential dropout, no one group is totally immune from the effects of becoming a dropout (Robison, 1996). This study continues to reinforce, and be reinforced by other researchers who report that students are at-risk of being a dropout by the end of tenth grade (Roberge, 1995; Weir, 1996). Many factors make up these students' choices to dropout that include family, society and school.

The family that is in disarray, and consistently trying to survive does not always have the time and energy needed to support their student's learning needs. Family disruptions can result in abuses to the child that can cause him or her to lose self esteem or sense of worth (Dougherty, 1996; Glasser, 1997; Glazer, 1970) and less family involvement with the school and student (Chubb et al., 1997; Dougherty, 1996), family stigmas and prejudices (Astone & Upchurch, 1994; Duarte, 1997; Kelly, 1997), and more boredom (Scales, 1996). Once these conditions are established, the student begins to find other ways to be affirmed and acknowledged such as becoming pregnant (Astone & Upchurch, 1994; Brindis & Philliber, 1998; Ludke, 1996), or going to work to achieve adult security (Astone & Upchurch, 1994; Stallman & Johnson, 1996).

Society aids in the at-risk puzzle by adding in prejudices, and a social bureaucracy that strengthens a family's distrust of government institutions (Atkinson, 1994; Gustafson & Cichy, 1996; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988) by not allowing this part of society to fully be acculturated (Jacob & Jordan, 1992). People in society have the ability to develop systems that can seem to entrench a

student's sense of "what is the use" (Emihovich & Fromme, 1998; Kozel, 1995; Modell & Alexander, 1997). Thus, using social programs that address the issues can also encourage choices that would appear to be a "bad" choice to mainstream teachers, no matter if they are liberal or conservative (Emihovich & Fromme, 1998; Kozel, 1995; Murphy, 1991). The society's government also adds to the student's challenge by writing and then enforcing laws that can be unyielding to many cultural communities and their needs (Duarte, 1997; Emihovich & Fromme, 1998; Wilson & Corcorcan, 1978), especially with rising graduation and age requirements (McGhan, 1997; Monson, 1997; Romo & Falbo, 1996). The final component to the society or community aspect is the economic structure of available jobs and tax structure that allows students to receive the quality education they desire or need to meet their goals as productive citizens (Stallman & Johnson, 1996).

Finally, the school's part of the puzzle, which involves the student's attitude and needs, the teacher's attitudes and needs, and the requirements of the community, needs to be addressed. Schools are essentially set up to fail most students that are historically at-risk, though not intentionally (Murphy, 1991). Brindis & Philliber (1998) point out that programs attempt to be a one- size-fits-all for a highly diverse society that often does not build on the resiliency and potential of youth (Bass, 1997). Emihovich & Fromme (1998) echo this concern that schools "struggling with national, state, and local demands to increase achievement levels, also find themselves grappling with myriad cultural,

economic, and social problems that today's urban youths bring to school" (p. 139). The personnel in schools are unable to see changing cultural scripts in their community (Emihovich & Fromme, 1998). For example, the teacher forgets to remember to focus on strengths of the student and just tries to just get though the day, overlooking the big picture or the real goal of his or her efforts (Bass, 1997). The teacher and other school personnel may overlook their greatest possible alley by not taking advantage of parents to help solve problems, and promoting literacy in any culture (Duarte, 1997; Romo & Falbo, 1996). These parents may have very little formal education in our culture, but are a wealth of information about their own, and dedicated to learning (Duarte, 1997). Not utilizing these parents only discourages a student' s self-esteem, because their family and culture are different or not good enough (Romo & Falbo, 1996).

At-risk students report they have problems getting and keeping their self-respect and being bored at school with often uninteresting or challenging work. One mother the writer spoke with, wondered why they were still doing the same science experiments as she did. Students in other informal conversations, talked about the gangs, crude behavior of other students and being treated like animals.[3] More concerns surface when racial issues are expressed. At-risk students have a great desire to be recognized, have privileges, and get good grades so they can get good jobs. Many wonder why teachers do not give them a chance to move past their mistakes and ask them why they do not just go ahead and drop out, as they are going nowhere anyway. Thus, these teachers enforce

students' feelings of unworthiness, isolation, and lack of ability (Robison, 1996; Scales, 1996; Smith, 1997).

The schools, parents, students, and society spend a lot of time blaming each other for these problems and challenges in education today. Though each has a part in the overall problem, education is an ongoing phenomenon that happens everywhere, in every facet of life (Abbott, 1997; Gardner, 1983; Glasser, 1997; Toeppen, 1997). Personnel in schools are often inflexible, so that they can perpetuate our society's beliefs, morals, and values (Bass, 1997; Glazer, 1987; Murphy, 1991). Duttweiler (1995), Gardner (1983), Glasser (1997), Hoerr (1996), and other authors point to a need to change and adapt to student needs and societal needs and styles, to give each segment of the community an opportunity to be successful.

PROCEDURES

The focus of this extensive literature review was how society, families, and schools are intertwined in a student's educational development, and how they can influence the student's view of the worth of getting a traditional high school diploma. Many writers have written extensively, in the last couple of years, about what schools need to do to change and decrease student dropout rates throughout the country, and raise test scores. The question remains whether or not test scores or productive citizens are of greater importance. If productive citizens is the answer, and not everybody has the same abilities or intelligences, then traditional courses and skills taught are not the answer to our

nation's needs. Often, the high school diploma does not meet the students' needs.

To develop guidelines to present to other educators and the school board for an alternative program, the author questioned what people really needed and wanted to know to be successful in life. Earlier in her life, the author had often questioned why some students of equal ability would dislike school, while their peers thought school was appropriate, met their needs, and was the place to be. Recently, during numerous, informal conversations the author had about schools in North Texas and the Oklahoma City areas, it was brought up how schools were still not meeting the needs of many students, and indeed were often damaging to students (See Appendix A). The conversations took place in middle class environments with both well educated parents, and others with limited education. Their children also seemed to be those without any diagnosed learning or emotional problems, yet they were in need of or desirous of alternatives to have successful, secondary educational careers (See Appendix B).

To enhance the guidelines, the researcher further utilized some former student and parent conversations that were held in student homes, during parent conferences, and other informal settings such as social gatherings. Secondly, the recent contacts that were noted previously, represented about 10 to 15 students and their parents discussing their thoughts and reactions to their experiences in alternative and regular educational settings. The outcome

indicated that 9 out of 10 were in favor of the alternative settings they had utilized and were pleased with the advancements made by their students (See Appendix B). One family, however, did not appear to think that the arts private school, and the vocational track their other child chose as an alternative educational choice.

Using the focus of conversations, committee meetings and related criteria, the primary purpose was to develop guidelines for a successful working model to be used and adapted to the community's needs, by secondary administrators and teachers. The educational environment in the guidelines addressed the needs of middle school, at-risk students that have developed patterns of failure or mediocrity, over a period of time, in the traditional school environment. The articles and studies were selected that encompassed the whole school environment on the student, family and community. The informational sources dated from 1988 to January, 1998 with the majority of the articles published in 1997. Books, that gave a historical perspective of the depth and consistency of students at-risk, were also used.

Finally, the author is able to be a member of two, ongoing, at-risk program committees, which aided in the development of the guidelines as a workable model. One committee is addressing the issue of the middle school student in need of alternative educational placement to catch up with his or her peers. This committee is addressing the issue through the use of an alternative campus and has met 5 times thus far (progress at this point is being impeded by

administrative and board procedure as well as the Community-In-School Committee). The second committee is currently doing a self-evaluation of several district alternative programs for the at-risk student that are currently in place in the district, both in-house and on alternative campuses. This committees has met 4 times and is still actively working. The results of attending the first two committees can be referenced in the Selected At-Risk, Special Programs Self-Study Goals, Impact, and Recommentations (See Appendix C for meeting goals and results that addressed several such programs).

As a result of these committees and outcomes, a guideline of workable ideas was developed which will become part of a larger report, to be later presented to secondary administrators and the school board. It is also noted, that such a change in a school environment can not take place with a one-person campaign, but as in every educational change, would occur as a committee with input from all portions of the community involved. The guideline was also intended to give a clearer understanding of what works most effectively with the at-risk student. It was also inclusive of solutions, whether the student is easily identified or not; in essence, of how to reach out to all students in a more realistic manner. The guideline and presentation that follows, also included ideas and alternative ways to rescue or rejoin lost students to the educational community through work-based education that best serves the needs of the student and the community (See Appendices D and E).

CONCLUSIONS

It is said that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." The original purpose of this paper was to address student needs by investigating and offering guidelines on alternative educational settings and why they worked better as that possible "ounce of prevention," than today's largely traditional, educational environment. By school personnel taking a proactive, positive set of actions to prevent any student from dropping out, and not just those easily identifiable, students will have less opportunity to feel the need to seek alternatives to be affirmed and successful. Even when a bad student is rewarded for his or her negative behavior, that student is successful. To avoid negative success, educators must seek out and use methods that will deliver positive outcomes, preventing the possibility of students dropping out.

This paper evolved into finding out how schools reach out to meet the needs of students and the community, as all are intricately intertwined. The evidence points out the need to have educators and the community reach out to each other and to the unexpected, at-risk student, by becoming more in tune to the students' and the community's needs. As educators and administrators reach out to their constituents or consumers, they become better informed of the changes needed. The needs result in better choices of programs and an image of being a service organization, rather than a governmental bureaucracy where students and the community have little recourse.

The writers of the articles reviewed, emphasized the need for communication and change to be improved as a solution to the enhancement of the quality of education within a community. It was also noted that the more educational training a teacher had, the less that teacher was able to communicate effectively with the students (Chidloe, 1996). It is also pointed out, by Murphy (1991) and Stevens et al. (1997), that school environments today are set up to expect failure, even if it is unintentional because teachers often forget that school is not the only place a person receives an education. School personnel, on the other hand, can be quite successful at maintaining low dropout rates when everyone is at a higher level of involvement for communication than currently used. Next, the standards need to be set high for all students, no matter what the educational curriculum and environment encompasses, both socially and academically but not to meet certain test score requirements in all cases. Even when the students have parents of another national origin or language, the greater the interaction between home and school, the greater the success rate of the students. This also empowers the parents to become more willing participants in their child's educational program and then set higher standards more consistently throughout the culture.

Research shows that when parents are interested in their student's educational process, they are willing to help the school meet their societal needs and cultural expectations that they have lost over time. Educators and administrators must be open to accept the possibilities of parents being a part of

their buildings, classrooms, and the opportunity of learning from each other, so that all are learning and thinking differently about the world around them.

Throughout the literature, it is repeated that what many students really need is a solid basis in the core subjects, to be accountable to themselves and others, and to get the parents positively reconnected as to how to problem-solve and work with others responsibly together as a community. To work with others means that they have an understanding of learning to work with others' differences, be those cultural, economic, or religious. These skills apply to all levels of jobs, as customer service, technology, or any other industry. Students that graduate with these skills will be hired more quickly, and maintain job positions longer. Today, educators still emphasize students work to figure problems out on their own and not cooperatively.

Other writers, such as Deborah Meir (1998), in the Phi Delta Kappan, emphasize the need to recognize that educational innovators can not be stagnant, because once that happens, they are no longer innovators. Educators and administrators must be willing to do more than the daily routines of teaching. Educators must be willing to change their teaching strategies to better address student learning styles and strategies. They must also learn to look outside their doors to include cooperative education and workbase methods throughout the grade levels, that more directly involve the business community. Secondly, educators must learn consistently to give students the opportunity to show greater responsibility for the direction of their education,

and their relationship to the community. This responsibility goes above turning in meaningless assignments, but towards coursework that is useful and product-oriented, which involves thinking that results in true learning.

As schools show signs of such innovations, that involve student input, student experience, parental aides and community leaders, and begin to tailor programs for students with histories of discipline problems, or with special academic interests, the more students reach out in the classroom and become more successful. Interactive education will invite and intrigue students to stay or to come back later, if they drop-out, and to be a part of a GED program. Again, administrators and other educators, must be willing to listen, ask for ideas, and then try the ideas which now include higher levels of parent involvement and flexible student programs. Once these programs become part of the predictable educational program, or educators stagnate in their methods, they lose their ability to remain new, innovative and effective. Programs must be allowed to be changed or to evolve around new curriculum opportunities that will best reach out to the needs of the community and allow for learning to happen outside classrooms. Educators must remember that not all learning happens at school, but also within families and real life experiences.

These opportunities must involve not only the individuals within the educational staff, but also be with the leaders of the community and available to all students, not just those with apparent needs. The community leaders can bring new insights as they develop their partnerships. Cooperative education or

workbase programs that will enhance economic opportunities dispel myths of what careers are available with training or apprenticeship mentoring. When such programs become available to all students, and not just a select few, the benefits will improve the whole community.

The reasons for a student being, or becoming at-risk are complex, as well as the solutions. In the complexity of the issue, each component has basic, underlying sources. The greatest factor is in student, peer and/or adult relationships. If students feel their basic needs are being met and they are responsible to someone for their behaviors, they will be more apt to feel a part of a community. There is also a strong correlation that grows between student expectations for him or herself, parent involvement, and the expectations of the culture or community regarding education. Stigmas or cultural biases of certain groups of people have also grown to be evident as to how teachers and schools would guide students toward their educational and life goals. Even the level of involvement of the educator with the student of different cultural heritage has a direct influence on a student's decisions about life.

The focus needs to be on the educator's ability to understand that the possibility of any student, at any time, can evolve into a student at-risk, when they are not meeting their potential, and when their basic needs are not being met. Students want to feel they are a part of their educational direction and be able to be responsible for those choices. This meets a need of feeling important and useful, or self-actualization. Secondly, when a student's life has had an

obvious, major life-change, or even one that may seem to be innocuous, a student's educational direction can be affected at any time. Therefore, the educator must be ready to extend a genuine, welcoming atmosphere to the whole community, adjust, listen, and encourage their students, to enable them to stay focused on their educational goals. Many excellent as well as special education teachers do so on a daily basis already, but it is essential that the entire building also be involved to be sure that no student or family is left out of the educational process.

The meetings this author attended, pointed out that the programs where teachers were involved with their programs and students, and sincere in what they were doing in and out of the classroom, were very successful. The programs are successful to the point that students want to remain a part of the program, and not return as a part of the larger student body. These students and teachers had bonded in away that they were supportive of each other. This kind of student-teacher interaction only strengthens the author's belief that most anyone can and will reach his or her anticipated level of expectations; no matter if it is set high or low by those around him or her, that is the level that will be attained.

To reach out and be significant in students' lives, educators and all other school personnel must invent and maintain a warm, receptive, and hospitable atmosphere. Each must be able to reflect their community by being a part or at a minimum, aware of its makeup. The author has also noticed that when an

educator is out in the community, their programs are more readily accepted and thus, received by the community at large.

Though little is truly new in this paper, it serves as a reminder to all educators and calls all educators to take notice again of why they teach, how they teach, and the reasons behind what they teach, so that they can reassess their own teaching standards. Educators must set high and realistic (i.e., those who have special identified needs) standards for all their students that go beyond the many academic achievement assessments or tests. By recognizing that student-set goals are real, more students and families will be more likely to be successful in their life, and whatever career choice they have, will allow for more productive and positive models for today's and future generations. The underlying problems that involve drug use, teen pregnancy, and other reasons for dropping out may not be totally eliminated, but can be greatly reduced when there are caring, supportive teachers and families, as well as many alternatives designed to meet the students' and community needs.

Each adult must be ready to listen, pay attention to the student, in spite of any personal agendas or visions of what should or should not be happening. Part of the process of change is the educator eliminating some walls and welcoming the real world into the classroom and working collaboratively, not just as a separate entity. Learning to look at the student each day with renewed expectation, enables each party to be open to being taught or being the teacher. When an educator can see the new potential of also being the learner, the

community will be more receptive and eager to take a positve and active part in the educational system.

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FOOTNOTES

[1]Reported on National Public Radio, All Things Considered, 1997.

[2] These conversations and informal questionnaires were filled out the first day of class of Homebound Instructions. The conversations were often held with parents after class in the student's home or at other conference or social gatherings. Both were recorded over the period of 1991-1997.

[3]Part of informal discussion with parent, after a home visit to her son in 1996.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

1990 - 1997

The following responses were made to an informal, getting-to-know you form that the author used when beginning a new student-teacher relationship. The students ranged in ages 9 to 18 or grades 4 to 12. The students were all in danger of becoming at-risk due to prolonged illnesses or were already at-risk as pregnant teenagers or those with serious emotional problems. Also some students did give multiple answers in some instances, so the tallies did not always add up the same. Other students may not have felt the need to answer.

#1. What concerns you the most about school?

Pass/Graduate - 7	Grades - 4	Distractions/Gangs - 3
Respect of Teachers - 2	Math - 2	Race Problems - 2
Boredom - 2	Clichés - 2	Teasing by kids - 2

Others include: None - I'm happy; being absent

#2. What is rewarding?

Freedom - 4	Driving - 4	Friends - 3
Recognition/Respect - 3	Grades - 2	

Others included: Staying caught up; sports; computers; success; nothing; money; and marriage

#3. Have you failed a grade before?

Yes: 11 (one failed twice) No: 10

Reasons for failing: Absence - 6 Didn't care (elementary level) -4

Sick - 2 Family Issues - 1

Current grades: <70% = 2 70 - 90% = 1

70 - 80% = 8 80 - 100% = 4

80 - 90% = 5 90's > = 3

#4. In spite of your failure or passing of grade levels, what has been your overall attendance record?

None existent: 2 Good: 10

Bad: 7 Great: 3

#5. What qualities do you most admire in another person?

Honesty/Trust; Sense of Humor/Happy; Friend; Helpful; Good self-image; Appearance; Caring/Kind; Listens; Loyalty; Loving; and Persistence (but not annoying)

#6. If you could do or have ANYTHING tomorrow, what would it be?

Money; To get well; Start a career; Mom be happy; Friends; Be married; Nothing; To be smart; Get a computer; Nothing and everything; A pet or games; Love; To travel; A baby; Be happy; A car; and A house.

APPENDIX B

INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The following information comes from informal conversations with students and/or parents of students who chose other alternatives for their education. These were all held during 1997 at either specific times or just happened at social gatherings where the subject came up and experiences were offered. Most happened in the North Texas area, but one conversation also happened through a relative in Oklahoma City.

1. Why did you seek an alternative campus (Magnet School) or program?
    - The regular program did not fit son's needs.
    - Didn't fit the larger campus though tried to return once grades fell and so went back to the Magnet to be successful again.
    - When I got to the Magnet school I actually found the academics to be harder; more demanding.
    - Wish we had had that alternative. My son's teachers were often hurtful, or discouraging.
2. What kind of environment did you find on the new campus or program?
    - Less discipline problems.
    - Higher level of expectation from teachers and each other on the campus.
    - Greater understanding of our problems and goals.
    - People of similar interests.

3. What about social activities?
    - She/he didn't care about sports and the games.
    - Music, art, vocational programs filled that space.
    - Still had plenty of opportunities to socialize through dances, performances, etc.
4. What about college or careers?
    - I've had several offers from colleges and with advanced placement programs.
    - I will go on to college. Probably a small campus again.
    - Expect no problem due to earlier standards set by my teachers.
    - The basics were still covered and S.A.T. scores were as high or higher than needed.
    - My vocational training and desire to work hard for my family keeps me focused and working hard to be one of the best in the store.
5. What if this area of interest doesn't work out in the future?
    - I can go back into something else and build on what she already knew at a college or university.
    - I can diversify.
    - She still received strong academics and maybe better than if she had been on a regular campus.

6. As parents, what kind of satisfaction have you had with your son's or daughter's education, either on a regular campus or Magnet/Alternative program?

- At the Magnet, the student was (or is) still successful and able to move on more quickly to his or her area of interest.
- College is still a real option, where it may not of been before.
- If things don't work out this way, he or she may and can return to a college in good standing later on, because he or she does have a diploma.
- The teachers seemed much better.
- She or he had greater achievement levels.
- Regular campus was hurting my student, and could have quit easily.
- Why do regular campuses or traditional schools still teach the same way they always have and not change when they know it is needed?
- Even if my daughter does find out the sciences aren't right for her, she still can have the confidence and knowledge that she can do well in whatever she chooses.

APPENDIX C

SELECTED AT-RISK/ SPECIAL PROGRAMS: SELF-STUDY ON GOALS, IMPACT, and RECOMMENDATIONS

PROGRAM NAME: Teenage Pregnant & Parenting Students (TAPPS)

GOALS:

- To keep pregnant and parenting students in school and on a positive educational track.
- To be able to accept more students in the program with an additional teacher and/or satellite campus.
- To attain greater funding from the school district as other funds run out.
- Eliminate reasons for teenage parenting student to withdraw from school.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS:

- Allows student to continue course work.
- Allows student to learn and prepare for parenting roles.
- Provide positive group support of other TAPPS students such that they stay in school.
- Helps the student find affordable day care and access other necessary government programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Include TAPPS coordinator and UBCL counselor on the agenda for District counselor's meeting at beginning of school year.
- Add a Junior High/Middle School TAPPS program.
- Find new sources to fund the program for adequate funding of additional and current program.

PROGRAM NAME: Nimitz - Task Force 68.9

GOALS:

- To increase student support systems throughout his or her high school career.
- To incorporate a more flexible system as to how students earn credit.
- Greater parent involvement through programs of parent aides, and/or parenting classes.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS:

- Students become aware of processes for improving social skills, which in turn improve academics.
- Teachers have flexible timelines, daily, weekly, yearly.
- Students can, within boundaries, achieve success at their own pace.
- Students begin to see education as part of the whole.
- Students can apply classroom learning to the outside world.
- Teachers tie learning from field trips to all core-curricular areas.

- Of 25 enrolled during 1997-98, 16 are now sophomores and 9 are juniors (5 did attend summer school). 64% passed at semester.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Evolve or modify program such that it can become proactive for past participants to access support when the student feels he or she is beginning to fail.
- Counselor to help students improve their self image, deal with problems more effectively, and make good life choices.
- Parents become more greatly involved in some manner.
- Expand to investigate career or life options with community influence.

PROGRAM NAME: Language Development Center

GOALS:

- To implement a flexible 2-year block to enable smoother student transitions to main campuses.
- To implement a career and technology program to address vocational needs of the students.
- To find and utilize a Partner In Education.
- To have night courses that will give older students a way to earn a GED diploma.
- Develop a working relationship with Northlake Community College to enhance older student learning opportunities.

- To add courseware/electives in heritage language.
- To increase math skills at a faster pace.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Supports heritage language while providing instruction in English content concepts and survival skills.
- Provides bilingual Spanish counseling and counseling in English for support.
- Language Arts instruction in Spanish for students speaking Spanish.
- Improve curriculum in specific classed with modifications to meet the needs of ESL students.
- Facilitates transition to regular campuses.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Find a Partner in Education to help increase student programming.
- Investigate the possibility of night classes and a GED program in conjunction with Northlake Community College - South Campus.
- Explore and implement vocational and career education possibilities.
- Implement a flexible 2-year block schedule for smoother transition to main campuses.
- Add a staff position to act as a liaison when students are transitioning to a main campus, and improve student achievement.

APPENDIX D

SCHOOL PLAN

ENVIRONMENT:

A high level of basic academic standards, in a positive supportive atmosphere, that is enhanced by the incorporation of good work habits through the encouragement of devoted and attentive teachers. A welcoming atmosphere that cultivates positive visions for future productive citizens for all that enter.

VISION STATEMENT:

All students have unique goals that need a flexible system of education that allows for creative and cooperative solutions.

PHILOSOPHY:

All students can reach their potential when given the appropriate tools, environment and opportunities to learn and achieve. All students can have access to this program at any reasonable time for a minimum of 12 weeks, or until it is clear they are back on course for success. Students have the ability to appropriately choose reasonable educational goals.

THE FOCUS:

- Students that educators traditionally overlook.
- Students that are from strong families, but choose alternative life-goals and so, choose alternative educational environments.
- Students with goals that do not fit the norm.

GOALS:

The middle school student will be provided access to an alternative educational service, when it is shown that the student's best educational interest is not being served within the traditional educational environment. Each student that returns to a traditional track will receive transitional support to encourage the progress made. Classes should include vocational options, be abbreviated to include the most important concepts, maintain a student's integrity and sense of worth and as being part of something that is relevant.

SUBJECTS TO BE OFFERED WITHIN A BLOCK SETTING:

Language Arts	Math	Social Studies
Physical Education	Science/Technology	Fine Arts

Each subject will be taught within a school-wide, thematic setting that will rotate on a semester basis and be inclusive of career investigation units. The teachers will also have ongoing training in learning styles, such that they will each use consistently the learning styles and/or multiple intelligences that will make student learning meaningful and worthwhile.

To better address the subjects of meaningful educational projects, students will be exposed on a regular basis to different community opportunities as productive citizens. The curriculum enhancements include activities such as large and then special smaller group discussions with community leaders. Smaller groups will be by either teacher

recommendation or student sign-up. In each situation, the student will need to come prepared with a list of ideas or thoughts about what is to be discussed or questions to be answered by the group leader. A teacher will be available to help relate the discussions later to class activity or be a liaison between the speaker, the organization represented, and the school.

It is further recommended that computers are provided for each classroom, and the teacher in the classroom. The number per classroom should be in line with district and state policy at the minimum, and have internet capabilities. Not only should the hardware be complete but the software up to date and supportive of the core curriculum, career investigations and training. The software should also be diagnostic in nature whenever possible, and capable of teacher controlled security (i.e. administrative assistant or ANAT software) of student internet activity.

PROGRAM SITE:

To maintain a least restrictive environment for these students, this program is best set within the regular school campus. Certain parts of the program may require off-campus meeting sites due to the nature of the program's and student goals. On these trips, teachers and other appropriate personnel should be available to enable the students to stay on task and focused to their goals as productive students.

Examples include: Trips to the court house, city hall, park locations, museums, places of business and industry.

Other reasons for maintaining such programs on a traditional campus, would include student services (lunchroom, nurse/clinic, library resources, and building maintenance), and school activities these students would not otherwise be able to access. They are not in this program for consequences, but for enhancements. Besides, all students can gain advantages from such a program.

FACULTY STAFFING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 Vice-Principal
- 1 Counselor
- 8 Teachers for two squads with no more than 15 students per class
- 1 Transitional Aide
- 1 Clerical Aide to assist with extra tracking and follow-up of absences and community communication.

APPENDIX E

Guidelines
for
Meeting A Student's Unique Needs

Val Cunningham,
Homebound Teacher
Gilbert Transitional Center

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Vision Statement

All students have unique goals that need a flexible system of education that allows for creative and cooperative solutions.

The Focus

- Students we traditionally overlook.
- Students that are from strong families, but choose alternative education.
- Students with goals that don't fit the norm.

Goal and Objectives

- Keep all students in a learning environment that will meet their goals.
- Students will not always take the traditional route to graduate.
- Includes vocational options.
- Abbreviated classes that include the most important concepts.
- Maintain a student's integrity and sense of worth.
- Students feel they are a part of something that is relevant.

Today's Situation

Unacceptable dropout rates at all socio- economic and cultural levels.

- Texas State-Wide
  - 1995 - 1.8%
  - 1996 - 2.6%

How Did We Get Here?

- 1840's ideas from European models
- State and National Laws for mandatory education
- Everybody blaming everybody else
- Urban to suburban cultures
- Inconsistent expectations of students and society

Credits: Glasser, 1997; Glazer, 1970; Modell & Trent, 1997;Wilson, 1988.

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Original Assumptions that Need Maintaining

- All students are unique
- No one person learns in the same way, at the same pace
- Society needs citizens with various levels of many skills
- Large schools are not always best
- Schools are for learning
- Learning doesn't always happen in a school environment

What Students Need To Know

- How to allocate time, money, materials, space, and staff.
- How to work in teams, teach others, negotiate, work well in culturally diverse groups.
- How to use information, especially in relation to computer processing.
- Understand social, organizational, and technical systems so they can monitor and correct performance in themselves and others.
- How to select and use tools, apply technology to specific tasks and maintain equipment.

Credit: Romo & Falbo, 1996

What Students Tend to Like

- Like to go to school to socialize.
- Sports teams - like and motivates them.
- Prefer money now than later.
- Don't always care about the honor roll, and may do enough just to pass.

Credit: Romo & Falbo, 1996

Students & Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning is a means of increasing student engagement in learning and preparing young people for employment. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act was inspired by the idea of apprenticeship, but wisely supports many other types of work-based learning from kindergarten through college.

Credit: Hamilton & Hamilton, 1997

Steps in Work-Based Learning

- Elementary through Middle School:

  Field trips and job-shadowing experiences.
- Middle School through High School:

  Work-like experiences which include servic-learning and unpaid internships.
- High School:

  Employment, which includes youth jobs, subsidized employment training, cooperative education and paid internships and apprenticeships.

Credit: Hamilton & Hamilton, 1997

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Available Options

- Design school day in a way that is most beneficial to all involved
- Involve the community in educational needs of students
- Create flexible educational paths for students to utilize
- Create educational alternatives that are safe, nurturing, and student-centered
- State cost of each option

Advantages

- Students will be able to find their niche for creating their own success.
- Success will create willing students and greater community participation.
- Improve parent willingness to keep their students in public school settings.
- Lower occurrence of discipline problems and dropout rates.

Disadvantages

- Changing school operational format.
- The need for additional personnel.
- Schedules that must be flexible to meet student needs and changing goals.
- Additional funding for unique learning opportunities.
- A need for changing teaching styles to address learning styles and job sites.

Recommendations

- Create district Magnet schools or schools-within-schools
- Design cooperative opportunities between districts and the business community
- Create schools-within-schools that allow for movement between programs
- Create alternative scheduling possibilities for all student needs

Essential Core Subjects to Address

- Language Arts
- Math
- Social Studies
- Physical Education
- Science/Technology
- Fine Arts

Action Steps

- Investigate ways to implement work-base programs.
- Begin with small schools within the larger school to address special needs. Then, if needed, the possibility of a separate magnet campus.
- Inservice teachers with a cohesive series of instructional activities to address individual learning styles
- Support the creation of an open and caring educational environment.
- Support teaching and the use of respect for all students.

Summarize

- Society's needs have changed. Schools must address the issues with greater openness.
- Educational institutions must make changes to address community and social needs.
- Implement more parent and business aides.
- Become more flexible.
- Listen to students and give opportunities to be successful.

Credits: Dougherty, 1996; Monson, 1997